

## Why Arab- Americans are unable to have a Lobby

Arabs in America are a vibrant community with many activities and social organizations that cater to the needs of people coming from different countries; however, they do not have an organization that represents all of them, not even a small portion of the estimated 2-3 million. All pan-Arab associations and organizations established in the past 2 to 3 decades were unable to capture the imagination of the young Arab Americans and lead them to become an effective community; a community that knows its rights and recognizes its limitations as well as its potentials, and able is to learn from its own mistakes and successes. One of the questions that bother many people is why Arabs in America have so far failed to develop an effective lobby. This is a difficult question for anyone to answer with confidence; nevertheless, no one should be denied the opportunity to try. In this short article, I shall try to give some clues to answering this question, hoping that others will follow and help reach a satisfactory answer. Therefore, everyone is invited, even encouraged, to contribute to answering this seemingly puzzling question; writing about an issue of concern to us helps us understand ourselves and what we need to know and do as a community to defend our rights and promote our causes.

Before we begin to answer this question, we need to ask first several questions; why Arabs left their homes in the first place and immigrated to America. This question has two parts; what are the reasons for leaving, or what are the push factors that pushed millions of Arabs to leave their countries; and what are the motives that motivated them to come to America, or what are the pull factors that attracted them to come to America. Other questions include; Are most Arabs able to let go of their longing to the old homeland and their attachment to its cultures? are they able to embrace the new homeland and its culture? How they see themselves in the new land? How do they conduct their lives? What do they really want? Do they feel happy living where they are and satisfied with what they do? These are big and important questions; yet, they have to be answered in order to measure our successes, our failures, and how to develop a community with specific goals and practical means to reach them.

If one considers communities that do have effective lobbies, he will find that almost all such communities have lived as minorities in the countries from which they came, some of them for centuries; Jews are a good example, and so are the Armenians. In contrast, Arabs in general did not live as a minority in any of the countries they came from. Minorities, wherever they may live, tend to feel threatened by majorities and thus to organize to protect their interests and strengthen their cultural and business ties. Christian Arabs living in America are better at organizing themselves than Muslims because of their minority status in almost all Arab states. Minorities that succeeded in having effective lobbies tend to have one single issue, or a major cause to unite them and motivate them to act; Arab

Americans have several issues; the Palestinian cause may be the most important issue for most Arabs; but it is not the only one. Religiously conservative Arabs see the protection and promotion of Islam as the most important issue, while liberals give priority to issues related to political reform. Some see human rights in the Arab world as a significant issue, while less educated people do not understand the true meaning and importance of this issue, especially to scientific progress and economic development in the Arab world.

In addition, Arabs in America are unable to communicate with each other effectively; they generally do not read and thus have failed to develop printed means of communications where they could talk about mutual concerns, express their opinions and try to help each other and develop an American subculture. In fact, while most Arabs I know do help their families back home and even the poor there, they are unable to see the need to establish an organization to help the needy Arabs in America. Jews, for example, have many organizations and several funds to help new immigrants settle, get good training to find a rewarding job and help them to get one; Arabs have none of that. Philanthropy in Arab history does not exist; we tend to help in emergencies only. Without institutionalizing such a support system, new immigrants will not find the assistance that many need to settle and lead a normal life and feel affinity to other members of their community. Such a system, even if most immigrants do not need it, will help everyone feel he and she belongs to a vibrant, caring community that share with them their joy and pain and hopes. Creating a sense of community through the development of shared interests and ties and effective means of communications is the only way to developing a lobby to help them defend their rights and promote their causes.

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